

November 12, 1850.

W. Yarrell, Esq., V.P., in the Chair.

Professor Owen read a paper "on the Cranium of the large species of *Dinornis* called *giganteus* and *ingens**." He commenced by referring to a former memoir, in which four generic types of structure had been determined in fossil crania of birds from New Zealand, viz. *Nestor*, *Notornis*, *Palapteryx*, and *Dinornis* proper; and proceeded to describe an additional series of fossil skulls obtained by Governor Sir George Grey from a cave in the district which lies between the river Waikato and Mount Tongariro, in the North Island. The most remarkable of these specimens was an almost entire skull, measuring eight inches in length and five inches across the broadest part of the cranium; which in the extent of the ossified part of the mandible and its downward curvature, resembled the smaller skull described in a former memoir, and there referred to *Dinornis*. In the structure of the occiput and base of the cranium, this large skull more resembled the characters of that ascribed to *Palapteryx*. The indications of the muscular attachments, and the form and size of the massive beak, bespoke the great power and force with which it had been habitually applied in the living bird.

Its anatomical characters were minutely detailed. Comparisons of the area of the occipital foramen for the transmission of the spinal marrow with that of the spinal canal in different vertebræ, were made with a view of determining the species to which the cranium in question might belong; and the peculiar contraction of the spinal canal in the vertebræ of *Dinornis* as compared with that in the Ostrich was pointed out. The inference deduced was, that the cranium, notwithstanding its great size, belonged probably to the species called *Palapteryx ingens*, which was the second in point of size.

A mutilated cranium of a much younger bird, showing all the sutures, but of nearly equal size with the skull first described, might belong to the *Dinornis giganteus*. Two crania, referable to two distinct species of smaller birds of *Palapteryx*, were described, and sections of the cranium were shown, to demonstrate the form and character of the brain. In the collection transmitted by Governor Grey, Professor Owen had, for the first time, recognized a portion of a diminutive wing-bone, similar, in the absence of the usual processes for the muscles of flight, to that in the *Apteryx*, and confirmatory, both by this character and its extreme rarity, contrasted with the abundance of vertebræ and leg-bones that had been transmitted, of the inference as to the rudimental condition of the wings in the *Dinornis* and *Palapteryx*.

The memoir concluded with a description of a cranium of the *Notornis*, more perfect than that fragmentary one on which the affinities

* This paper will appear in the Transactions as *Dinornis*, Part V., in continuation of Prof. Owen's previous memoirs.

of that bird to the *Rallidæ* or Coot-tribe had originally been founded, and its generic distinction from *Porphyrio* established. The specimen exhibited confirmed the accuracy of the conjectural restorations in the figure of the original specimen in a former volume of the Transactions of the Society.

The following papers were also read :—

1. NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY BY MR. WALTER MANTELL IN THE MIDDLE ISLAND OF NEW ZEALAND, OF A LIVING SPECIMEN OF THE NOTORNIS, A BIRD OF THE RAIL FAMILY, ALLIED TO BRACHYPTERYX, AND HITHERTO UNKNOWN TO NATURALISTS EXCEPT IN A FOSSIL STATE. BY GIDEON ALGERNON MANTELL, ESQ., LL.D., F.R.S. ETC.

Amongst the fossil bones of birds collected by my eldest son in the North Island of New Zealand, which I had the honour of placing before the Zoological Society in 1848, in illustration of Professor Owen's description of the crania and mandibles of *Dinornis*, *Palapteryx*, &c., there were the skull, beaks, humerus, sternum, and other parts of the skeleton of a large bird of the Rail family, which from their peculiar characters were referred by that eminent anatomist to a distinct genus of *Rallidæ* allied to the *Brachypteryx*, under the name of *Notornis* *; a prevision, the correctness of which is confirmed by the recent specimen that forms the subject of the present communication.

Towards the close of last year I received from Mr. Walter Mantell another extensive and highly interesting collection of fossils, minerals, and rock specimens, obtained during his journey along the eastern coast of the Middle Island, from Banks' Peninsula to the south of Otago, in the capacity of Government Commissioner for the settlement of native claims. This series comprised also a fine suite of birds' bones from Waingongoro, the locality whence the former collection was chiefly obtained, and among them were relics of the *Notornis*, and crania and mandibles of *Palapteryx*.

The results of my son's observations on the geological phenomena presented by the eastern coast of the Middle Island are embodied in a paper read before the Geological Society in February last, and published in vol. v. of the 'Quarterly Journal.' It will suffice for my present purpose to mention that they confirm in every essential particular the account given of the position and age of the ornithic ossiferous deposits, in my first memoir on this subject †.

The only fact that relates to the present notice is the nature of the bone-bed at Waikonaiti, whence Mr. Percy Earl, Dr. Mackellar, and other naturalists procured the first relics of the gigantic birds, sent by those gentlemen to England, which are figured and described in the 'Zoological Transactions.'

This so-called tertiary deposit is situated in a little bay south of Island Point, near the embouchure of the river Waikonaiti, and is

* Zoological Transactions, vol. iii. p. 366. † Geological Journal, vol. iv.

only visible at low-water, when bones more or less perfect are occasionally observable projecting from the waterworn surface of the bog. This deposit is about 3 feet in depth and not more than 100 yards in length; the extent inland is concealed by vegetation and a covering of superficial detritus, and is supposed to be very inconsiderable. This bed rests upon a blue tertiary clay that emerges here and there along that part of the coast, and which abounds in shells and corals, of species existing in the adjacent sea.

This bone deposit was evidently a morass or swamp, on which the New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*) once grew luxuriantly. Bones of the larger species of Moa have from time to time been obtained from this spot by the natives and European visitors; and, as in the menaccanite sand beds at Waingongoro, they are associated with bones of one species of dog and two species of seal: my son also collected crania and other remains of a species of *Apteryx* (probably *Ap. Australis*), Albatros, Penguin, and of some smaller birds whose characters and relations have not yet been ascertained: no bones of the *Notornis* were observed in this locality.

It was from this ancient morass that my son obtained the entire series of bones composing the pair of feet of the same individual *Di-nornis robustus*, standing erect, the one about a yard in advance of the other, as if the unfortunate bird had sunk in the slough, and unable to extricate itself had perished on the spot. The upper or proximal ends of the tarso-metatarsals were alone visible above the sod on the retiring of the tide; these were carefully dug round, and the phalanges exposed in their natural order and connection: the bones were numbered as they were extracted from the soil, and thus the normal elements of the locomotive organs of one of the colossal struthious bipeds of New Zealand were for the first time determined*.

It was in the course of last year, on the occasion of my son's second visit to the south of the Middle Island, that he had the good fortune to secure the recent *Notornis* which I have now the pleasure of submitting to this Society, having previously placed it in the hands of the eminent ornithologist Mr. Gould to figure and describe, as a tribute of respect for his indefatigable labours in this department of Natural History.

This bird was taken by some sealers who were pursuing their avocations in Dusky Bay. Perceiving the trail of a large and unknown bird on the snow with which the ground was then covered, they followed the foot-prints till they obtained a sight of the *Notornis*, which their dogs instantly pursued, and after a long chase caught alive in the gully of a sound behind Resolution Island. It ran with great speed, and upon being captured uttered loud screams, and fought and struggled violently; it was kept alive three or four days on board the schooner and then killed, and the body roasted and ate by the crew, each partaking of the dainty, which was declared to be delicious. The beak and legs were of a bright red colour. My son

* The principal dimensions of these bones are given in the Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society, vol. vi. p. 338; and figures with descriptions in 'The Pictorial Atlas of Organic Remains,' just published.

secured the skin, together with very fine specimens of the Kakapo or Ground Parrot (*Strigops*), a pair of Huias (*Neomorpha*), and two species of Kiwi-kiwi, namely *Apteryx Australis* and *Ap. Oweni*; the latter very rare bird is now added to the collection of the British Museum.

Mr. Walter Mantell states, that, according to the native traditions, a large Rail was contemporary with the Moa, and formed a principal article of food among their ancestors. It was known to the North Islanders by the name of "*Moho*," and to the South Islanders by that of "*Takahé*;" but the bird was considered by both natives and Europeans to have been long since exterminated by the wild cats and dogs, not an individual having been seen or heard of since the arrival of the English colonists. That intelligent observer, the Rev. Richard Taylor, who has so long resided in the islands, had never heard of a bird of this kind having been seen. In his '*Leaf from the Natural History of New Zealand**,' under the head of "*Moho*," is the following note: "RAIL, colour black, said to be a wingless bird as large as a fowl, having a long bill and red beaks and legs; it is nearly exterminated by the cat: its cry was 'keo, keo.'" The inaccuracy and vagueness of this description prove it to be from native report and not from actual observation. To the natives of the paha or villages on the homeward route, and at Wellington, the bird was a perfect novelty and excited much interest. I may add, that upon comparing the head of the bird with the fossil cranium and mandibles, and the figures and descriptions in the '*Zoological Transactions*' (pl. 56), my son was at once convinced of their identity; and so delighted was he by the discovery of a living example of one of the supposed extinct contemporaries of the Moa, that he immediately wrote to me, and mentioned that the skull and beaks were alike in the recent and fossil specimens, and that the abbreviated and feeble development of the wings, both in their bones and plumage, were in perfect accordance with the indications afforded by the fossil humerus and sternum found by him at Waingongoro, and now in the British Museum, as pointed out by Professor Owen in the memoir above referred to.

It may not be irrelevant to add, that in the course of Mr. Walter Mantell's journey from Banks' Peninsula along the coast to Otago, he learnt from the natives that they believed there still existed in that country the only indigenous terrestrial quadruped, except a species of rat, which there are any reasonable grounds for concluding New Zealand ever possessed. While encamping at Arowenua in the district of Timaru, the Maoris assured him that about ten miles inland there was a quadruped which they called Káurēke, and that it was formerly abundant, and often kept by their ancestors in a domestic state as a pet animal. It was described as about two feet in length, with coarse grisly hair; and must have more nearly resembled the Otter or Badger than the Beaver or the Ornithorhynchus, which the first accounts seemed to suggest as the probable type. The offer of a liberal reward induced some of the Maoris to start for the interior of the country where the Káurēke was supposed to be located, but

* Published at Wellington, 1848.

they returned without having obtained the slightest trace of the existence of such an animal; my son, however, expresses his belief in the native accounts, and that if the creature no longer exists, its extermination is of very recent date.

In concluding this brief narrative of the discovery of a living example of a genus of birds once contemporary with the colossal Moa, and hitherto only known by its fossil remains, I beg to remark, that this highly interesting fact tends to confirm the conclusions expressed in my communications to the Geological Society, namely, that the *Dinornis*, *Palapteryx*, and related forms, were coeval with some of the existing species of birds peculiar to New Zealand, and that their final extinction took place at no very distant period, and long after the advent of the aboriginal Maoris. As my son at the date of his last letter was about to depart on another exploration of the bone deposits of the North Island, I indulge the hope that he will ere long have the gratification of transmitting or bringing to England additional materials for the elucidation of the extinct and recent faunas of New Zealand.

With much pleasure I resign to Mr. Gould the description of the ornithological characters and relations of this, in every sense, *rara avis*, from the Isles of the Antipodes.

Chester Square, Pimlico, November 1, 1850.

2. REMARKS ON NOTORNIS MANTELLI. BY J. GOULD, F.R.S.

(Aves, Pl. XXI.)

Dr. Mantell having kindly placed his son's valuable acquisition in my hands for the purpose of characterizing it in the Proceedings of the Society, and of afterwards figuring and describing it in the appendix to my work on the 'Birds of Australia,' I beg leave to commence the pleasing task he has assigned to me.

The amount of interest which attaches to the present remarkable bird is perhaps greater than that which pertains to any other with which I am acquainted, inasmuch as it is one of the few remaining species of those singular forms which inhabited that supposed remnant of a former continent—New Zealand, and which have been so ably and so learnedly described, from their semi-fossilized remains, by Professor Owen; who, as well as the scientific world in general, cannot fail to be highly gratified by the discovery of a recent example of a form previously known to us solely from a few osteological fragments, and which, but for this fortunate discovery, would in all probability, like the Dodo, have shortly become all but traditional. While we congratulate ourselves upon the preservation of the skin, we must all deeply regret the loss of the bones, any one of which would have been in the highest degree valuable for the sake of comparison with the numerous remains which have been sent home from New Zealand.

Upon a cursory view of this bird it might be mistaken for a gigantic kind of *Porphyrio*, but on an examination of its structure it will be



NOTORNIS MANTELLI. Owen

